

Battle of Britain



Above, Battle of Britain veterans had the opportunity to check out an F-15 during the reunion activities. Left, a veteran remembers while looking at a display in the Battle of Britain room in the officers' club.



On the Cover

Graphic by
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Memorial service highlights annu

By SrA. Lisa Krebs
Public affairs

Beneath a sky as clear as is ever found in England, veterans from one of the greatest aerial battles ever gathered together for the Battle of Britain memorial service held here Saturday.

Group Commander Dennis David, who had achieved the Royal Air Force rank of Group Captain in only four years, was the speaker for the memorial service at Lakenheath's Wings of Liberty Park. As he spoke to the mixed group of veterans, American military, and other onlookers, there was a silence that enabled his soft voice, cracking with both age and emotion, to carry through the air. While he spoke, each breeze seemed to carry a hint of the pilots' spirits who've gone before him.

"It's hard to imagine the anger we had, so angry as young men," said David. He emphasized the word 'angry' with a quiet intensity that gave only a sense of the rage the young British pilots must have felt before each battle. "We got tired of those black crosses flying in the sky dropping bombs on our country, our homes, our mothers and fathers."

In the end, the pilots defeated the Luftwaffe aircraft with their "black crosses" with support from 15 other nations, successfully defending England from a Nazi invasion. With this victory, however, came great losses to the British.

"It got to be that one day you'd invited someone over for tea, but they wouldn't show up. And every day there'd be less that would show up. After a while, some of us stopped making friends altogether," explained David. "It got to be too hard to do so."

The Battle of Britain was a four-month aerial struggle to defend England from Hitler's Operation Sealion. His plan was to defeat the RAF and follow up with a land invasion from his Wermacht across the Channel. The British army, devastated after the battle at Dunkirk, was in no condition to defend against the German army. Victory in the air was vital to England, for a loss would have meant certain defeat and the total Nazi domination of Europe.

Through pitched aerial battle that summer in 1940, more than 1,300 Luftwaffe aircraft were

destroyed. The RAF lost along with the lives of

The veterans of this with age, others walking heads bowed during the ment of silence, seeming time and another day. Squadron's missing n breaking the stillness, raised, as the somber

Every year, less pilots, dubbed "E" Epilots, dubbed "E" ister Winston Churchill annual reunion. Those the simple reason of re pilots who gave their li be won.

"Lest we forget,"



Photos by SrA. Grace Hun

Group Commander Dennis David, left, and Col. Doug Richardson, 48th Fighter Wing commander, unveil the memorial stone.

ness, of the American David, who thanked t veterans each year.

This year the veter thanks by the 48th Figh a memorial stone dedica Battle of Britain pilots who've passed away.

Col. Doug Richa mander, and Da of Britain stone before the memorial service. inscribed with a brief gagement fought that s

It also features etch flown in the Battle of E stone to be placed ac park in a soon-to-be co ain Memorial Park, acc Squadron officials.

"It's only a small ge we as a free people can o pilots who fought so wel said Richardson. "As 'Never in the field of hu owed by so many to so

Some of 'The Few' were Americans

By MSgt. Bill Harris
48 FW historian

ual reunion

st more than 750 aircraft,
F many young pilots.

is battle, some stooped
ng with canes, kept their
e memorial service mo-
ng to remember another
When the 493rd Fighter
man fly-by roared past,
every silver-haired head
moment passed.

and less of the heroic
The Few" by Prime Min-
ll, are able to attend the
that do show come for
membering their fellow
ves that the battle could

explained Wing Com-
mander P.P.C.
Barthropp, a Battle
of Britain veteran.
"Rudgard Kipling
said it best."

The Battle of
Britain Fighter Pi-
lots reunion began
in 1971 at RAF
Alconbury, and was
held there annually
until the base
closed. Since 1992,
RAF Lakenheath
has carried on the
tradition.

"We are deeply
conscious of the
generosity, and kind-
ness in our country," said
the base for hosting the

rans received a special
hter Wing in the form of
ated to the memory of the
, those living, and those

ardson, 48th FW com-
avid unveiled the Battle
the 150 people attending
Titled, "The Few," it's
history of the aerial en-
summer, 57 years ago.
ings of the four aircraft
Britain. Plans call for the
ross the street from the
nstructed Battle of Brit-
ording to Civil Engineer

sture of the gratitude that
ffer to those brave, young
ll in the summer of 1940,"
Winston Churchill said,
man conflict was so much
few."

The 48th Fighter Wing was recently
host to Battle of Britain Fighter As-
sociation veterans for their annual reunion.
During the Battle of Britain, Royal Air Force
pilots held off the German air assault and a
Nazi invasion was averted. One startling
fact is that Americans participated in the
four-month struggle, flying in the uniforms
of the RAF and setting some rather interest-
ing historical precedents themselves.

While the war in Europe seemed distant for
most Americans, others felt drawn to the
glamour and glory of aerial combat. Such was
the case with three rather interesting charac-
ters with the names of E.Q. "Red" Tobin,
Andy Mamedoff and Shorty Keough. Tobin
was a tall, loose-limbed Jimmy Stewart type.
Mamedoff was second in height, a tubby
fellow with a round face and a ready-grown RAF mus-
tache. Keough stood 4 feet 10 inches and required
cushions to build up his cockpit seat. Keough, nonethe-
less, proved to be a miracle pilot, capable of making the
Spitfire perform better things than the RAF test pilots did.

These three farm boys, known as the comedy trio,
found themselves flying Spitfires for the 609th Squadron
during the most intense part of the Battle of Britain. While
with the squadron, each scored numerous aerial victo-
ries. On Sept. 15, the day the Luftwaffe launched its
maximum effort against the RAF, every pilot flew four
sorties each. Upon landing, the exhausted pilots were
called to Church Fenton to begin organizing the 71st
Squadron, the first of the famous Eagle Squadrons.

At the request of the Air Ministry, Prime Minister
Winston Churchill formed the 71st, and later
121st and 133rd Squadrons in an effort to convince the
United States to enter the war against Germany. The
U.S. Army Air Forces would later use these pilots as
the core for its first fighter group in the European
theater.

Each one of these pilots left their legacies with their



Courtesy photos

From left, Dick McMinn, Bill O'Reagan, Stan Anderson,
Pete Peterson, Oscar Coen, Bob Boock and Jim Clark
with the 334th Squadron at Debden in January 1943.

squadron mates. Their combat experience and dedica-
tion to cause provided the experience so badly needed
by the pilots that comprised the three Eagle Squad-
rons. One such pilot, a blond-haired dropout from
Brigham Young University, was named Chesley
Peterson. Peterson joined the 71st Squadron in Octo-
ber, 1940 and soon became one of the most colorful
pilots of the entire war.

Peterson flunked out of flying training at Randolph
Field because his instructors said, "He wouldn't
amount to anything." Nonetheless, his determination
led him to become an Eagle ace with nine enemy planes
to his credit (and three more after leaving the RAF). He
was also shot down four times. He later commanded
the 71st Squadron and led it to become one of the
squadrons most feared by the Luftwaffe and most
respected by the RAF. He also married motion picture
personality Audrey Boyes.

In August 1942, the three Eagle Squadrons were
absorbed into the U.S. Army Air Forces as the 4th
Fighter Group and would later hold the distinction of
destroying more enemy aircraft than any USAAF unit
in WW II. With the rank of
lieutenant colonel, Peterson
became the group's deputy
commander. Eight months later,
Peterson, at the tender but ex-
perienced age of 23, pinned on
colonel—a record that still
stands in U.S. Air Force his-
tory.

On May 27, 1953, Colonel
Chesley Peterson assumed
command of the newly-acti-
vated 48th Fighter-Bomber
Wing at Chaumont Air Base,
France. As commander,
Peterson led the 48th to be-
come the premiere fighter wing
within USAF and was respon-
sible for giving the wing its
current designation as the
"Statue of Liberty Wing."



E.Q. "Red" Tobin